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REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

A Study of Ethical Principles. By JAMES SETH, Professor of Philosophy in Brown University. New York, imported by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894. — pp. xvi, 460.

This book has much to commend it, but nothing more than the fine moral spirit of the author which breathes through all parts and especially through those sections describing the concrete moral life of mankind. It is a pity that the work is not more popular; it would have been edifying reading for the average educated man as a discourse on morality. The style lends itself to such a purpose. It is clear, slightly rhetorical, instinct with literary feeling, and abounding in allusion and quotation. But the contents of the volume are not adapted to the taste of the uninitiated. Analysis and criticism, history and philosophy, theory and practice alike enter into its composition. Indeed, I have often asked myself in reading the work for what class of readers it was intended; and even now I am unable to answer the question satisfactorily. It is not suitable to the capacity of the general public or even the educated portion of it; it is too technical for their understanding. For a treatise addressed to the professional philosopher it contains much historical and other matter that might well have been omitted. Probably it is best adapted for use by students, though merely as a text-book it would have been improved by condensation at some points and expansion at others. Nevertheless, it is a very interesting and suggestive volume; and no one can read it without getting fresh light on the ethical problems of the day or (it may be added) without finding his own moral life quickened and strengthened. It is personality that touches us; and one knows in reading this book that the author has put *himself* into it. Versed in the history of ethical thought, he is yet not awed by the great names on its calendar, from Socrates and Plato and Aristotle down to Kant and Hegel and Spencer; and dares to set down as solutions of the greatest problems which can occupy the human mind those views which approve themselves to his own judgment, whether they be old or whether they be new. Independence of thought and comprehensiveness of view are the leading notes of Professor Seth's work.

The volume is made up of an Introduction (pp. 1-74) and three Parts (pp. 77-460). Part I. (pp. 77-246) is devoted to ethical theory, Part II. (pp. 249-338) to moral life, and Part III. (pp. 341-460) to the metaphysical implications of morality.

The introductory section has a very loose connection with what follows. It contains three chapters on the problem, the method, and the psychological basis of Ethics. "The task of Ethics," the author concludes, "is the discovery of the central principle of moral or spiritual life, as the task of Biology is the discovery of the central principle of physical life" (p. 20). But as Professor Seth contends (justly, I think) that we must have a Metaphysics as well as a Science of Ethics, the comparison with Biology is not happy; for if the biologist applied his method and ideal to the study of moral phenomena the result would be only a phenomenalistic science. The definition suggests a second difficulty. What right have we to assume that our "moral or spiritual life" can be expressed in the formula of a single principle? No doubt this is the tacit assumption of hedonist and of transcendentalist alike; but when I recall the different virtues of veracity, purity, benevolence, justice, etc., I find weighty grounds for doubting if the essence of all of them can be compressed into a single formula. At any rate it is only after the possibility of the unification has actually been demonstrated that one should assume that Ethics is required to effect it. On the face of it, Ethics is simply a reflective study of the facts of the moral life of man. These facts are written in the consciousness of the individual and on the records which the race has left of its inner life. On its scientific side, therefore, Ethics has both a psychological and an historical aspect. But the facts of our moral life as thus ascertained are found to have (if we listen to the voice, not of a few demonstrative agnostics, but of humanity in general) a reference not only to nature but to God, who is the source and ground both of the moral agent and of the world in which he is. It is perhaps the greatest merit of Professor Seth's book that he brings this fact into due prominence. In spite of the phenomenalistic trend of current ethical thinking, the fact remains that man is not only a natural but also a spiritual being, and that the norm of his living must have therefore a relation to God as well as to the physical universe in which his actions are unfolded. As Professor Seth admirably says, "An adequate ethical view is not reached, a satisfactory explanation of morality is not attained, so long as one separates morality either from nature or from God" (p. 31). This is the justification for that Metaphysics of Ethics on which Professor Seth lays so much stress.

There are three chapters in Part I., entitled Hedonism, or the Ethics of Sensibility, Rigorism, or the Ethics of Reason, and Eudæmonism, or the Ethics of Personality. The first two trace Hedonism and Stoicism from their rise among the Greeks down to the present day, and point out the defects of these systems. The exposition is clear and, in spite of the generalizations which brevity necessitated, in the main just; and if the criticisms contain little that is new, it is because the subject has already been so thoroughly threshed that nothing new remained to be said. Beginners will appreciate the amount of information—historical and critical—which is brought together in these two chapters. There are one or two criticisms, however, to which certain passages in these chapters are open. When Professor Seth speaks of the melancholy of the Stoics as “strange to the buoyant spirit of the earlier Greeks” (p. 160), he must have forgotten that when the Greek first appears on the stage of human history, his character is tinged with a vein of melancholy, as may be seen from the Homeric poems, in which also its source is traced to Hellenic insight into the limitations of humanity. This is only an incidental remark, and, whether true or false, it is not of any great importance. The same cannot be said, however, of Professor Seth’s account of the Intuitionists and especially of Butler. Professor Sidgwick certainly gives all the emphasis it will stand to Butler’s doctrine of Self-love; but when our author, following along the same line, declares that with Butler “Virtue is not synonymous with Benevolence, but in a sense it is synonymous with Self-love” (p. 180), one would like to know what that favorite phrase, “*in a sense*,” (which Professor Seth seems to have adopted from English Hegelians) really means in this connection. The statement will surprise students of Butler. The demand for an explanation is the more imperative as we are told on the next page (p. 181) that “His *refusal to identify Conscience with Self-love* leads Butler to rest in an irreducible dualism of the spheres governed by these two principles respectively—the spheres of Virtue and Prudence.”

The objections which Professor Seth brings forward to the ethical position of Butler and the Intuitionists are equally applicable to his own theory, and indeed to every ethical theory—excepting that which “explains” virtue by resolving it into something else. When he says they give us “no explanation of morality, no theory of virtue” (p. 181), I would ask if the formula of Self-realization does anything better. Professor Seth seems to think that Intuitionism must be beaten down or he cannot advance to the heights of “Eudæ-

monism or the Ethics of Personality"; and from the way in which he lays about him he gives the impression that he is animated, less by the inspiration of a new discovery, than by an irrepressible suspicion that Intuitionism is the last word of Ethics, and yet that it is a very prosaic, humble, and unfashionable creed. The following passage, at any rate, sounds rather like an attempt to disown than to report Intuitionism: "Morality is reduced to 'simple' or ultimate ideas—such as Justice, Temperance, Truthfulness; these, it is claimed, have no history, and their *a priori* origin is the source of their absolute validity" (p. 184). It is a fact that when we reflect on the morality of men we find it contains norms of justice, temperance, truthfulness, etc.; but I know no Intuitionist who denies these virtues have had a history; and since the adoption by science of the historical and comparative method, I know no Intuitionist who deems that history unimportant; and if any Intuitionist ever claimed that the validity of these moral laws depended upon their *a priori* origin he was not a follower of Butler, and he has mistaken the accidental associations of the theory for its essential teaching. However these virtues may have originated, and whatever their history, the moral consciousness of to-day recognizes they have a right to us; and the Intuitionist accepts that claim of goodness to us as final and holds it cannot be "explained" or "accounted for" by anything which does not itself presuppose it. If in former times, under the influence of the controversy between Nativism and Empiricism, the centre of interest was transferred from the nature of moral distinctions to the manner in which they are known, Butler at any rate is free from this confusion, and among the representative Intuitionists of the present day—Martineau, for example—no trace of it will be found. The Intuitionism which Professor Seth rejects is largely an imaginary, where it is not an obsolete, theory. That he has entered with so little sympathy into the essential spirit of Intuitionism is perhaps evidence of a recoil from some narrow form of the theory.

Let us now turn to Professor Seth's own ethical doctrine. And first of all what is the problem to be solved? Here it is, clearly stated: "The real question of Ethics is not . . .: How do we come to *know* moral distinctions? but, What *are* these distinctions? What is the Moral Ideal—the single criterion which shall yield all such distinctions? . . . Short of such unity, philosophy cannot rest" (p. 187). Now this unitary principle Professor Seth finds in Self-realization. This is something of a truism, he admits (p. 204); for in our moral life we are conscious of impulses and solicitations of

different worth, and the important question is through which of these can the highest self be realized; and it would seem that some other standard was necessary for the determination of this point. However, the author tells us what he means by Self-realization. It "means that the several changing desires, instead of being allowed to pursue their several ways, and to seek each its own good or satisfaction, are so correlated and organized that each becomes instrumental to the fuller and truer life of the rational human self" (p. 206). That is to say, we realize ourselves when our impulses are organized, some subordinated as lower to others which are higher. Very good; but how is that organization effected? on what principle? No doubt, if effected, we shall realize our highest selves by heeding the comparative worths of our various impulses; but the question remains, which Professor Seth regards as the fundamental question in Ethics, namely, How these moral distinctions have been made. Self-realization follows upon their observance; but it is not that "single criterion which shall yield all such distinctions." What Professor Seth practically does is this: he accepts the intuitional theory and adds the remark that the virtuous man realizes his highest Self—even in suffering for the good. Self-realization is not an explanatory principle of morality; it is a supplementary faith that when we are moral we reach our truest selves, nay, that when called in the name of goodness to lose our lives we actually find our lives. But of course this does not tell us anything about the ground of moral distinctions, much less reveal a unitary ground of them all. You cannot get behind the deliverances of the moral consciousness and explain them by something outside. And when Professor Seth goes on to illustrate from philosophy and literature—and the latter illustrations make delightful reading—the theory of Self-realization, it is suggestive to find that the first name is that of the father of modern Intuitionism—Butler.

I have examined but little more than half the volume. In Part II., moral life is discussed from the point of view of the individual and of society,—the virtues in the former sphere being Temperance and Culture, and in the latter Justice and Benevolence. Here the author is seen at his best; his fine moral spirit and insight have free play, unhampered by the demands of speculation and careless about exhaustive analyses. He does not take up all the virtues; several in fact are omitted; nor does he "run down," in the manner of Professor Sidgwick, Justice, Benevolence, or any other portion of the chase; yet he sheds new light upon the nature and relations of the

virtues he examines, and gives rare glimpses into their inmost essence. The supplementary section on the State is too brief for so large a subject, but the author shows the moral basis of property and discloses the moral barriers to the nationalization of individual possessions.

Part III. deals with the subjects of Freedom, God, and Immortality as implications of the moral life. Professor Seth had already written on the former subject, and his views have not materially changed. Only a few pages are given to the problem of immortality. In the longer chapter devoted to the problem of God, Professor Seth gives his own view as follows:—

“If Philosophy finds itself precluded from going the whole length of the Christian doctrine of divine Providence, yet it seems to me that Christianity puts into the hands of philosophy a clue which it would do well to follow up, especially since the conception is not altogether new, but is the complement and development of the Aristotelian and Stoic theology which I have just sketched. All that I am concerned at this point to maintain is the speculative legitimacy and necessity of the demand for a Moral Order somehow pervading and using (in however strange and unexpected wise) the order of Nature, and thus making possible for the moral being the fulfillment of his moral task, the perfect realization of all his moral capacities.”

That Professor Seth faces the theological issue seems to me one of the best features of his book. We may put theology out of our laboratories and libraries; but since man, though a product of nature, is also a revelation of God, the moral and spiritual life in which his being flowers must always be a book closed with seven seals to every merely naturalistic theory of Ethics.

J. G. SCHURMAN.

Social Evolution. By BENJAMIN KIDD. Macmillan & Co., New York and London, 1894. — pp. x, 348.

Prior to the appearance of the present book Mr. Kidd had published, so far as I am aware, only a few essays on biological subjects, *e.g.*, *Birds of London*, *Aphides*, *Origin of Flowers*. Their themes may throw light on his previous lines of work and explain the biological leaning noticeable in his *Social Evolution*. The author conceives of social progress as governed by biological laws. There are “certain elementary biological laws of which it is the result and which have controlled and directed it as rigidly as the law of gravity con-